

## GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF NON-VIOLENCE

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### ABSTRACT

The Present paper discusses the philosophy of 'non-violence' (ahimsa) of Mahatma Gandhi, which he devised as a weapon to fight the brute force of violence and hatred, hailing it as the only way to peace. Gandhi based his philosophy of non-violence on the principle of love for all and hatred for none. He thought violence as an act caused to a person directly or indirectly, denying him his legitimate rights in the society by force, injury or deception. Gandhi's non-violence means avoiding violent means to achieve one's end, howsoever, lofty it might be, as he firmly believed that the use of violence, even if in the name of achieving a justifiable end was not good, as it would bring more violence. He firmly adhered to the philosophy of Gita that preaches to follow the rightful path, remaining oblivious of its outcome. Gandhi used non-violence in both his personal and political life and used it first in South Africa effectively and back home he applied it in India against the British with far more astounding success, as it proved supremely from the British servitude. However, he never tried to use it as a political tactic to embarrass the opponent or to take undue advantage of his adversity. The two basic principle or ideals that guided Gandhi's life were truth and non-violence. For him truth was God and realizing this truth as God was the ultimate purpose of life. He expounded the proposition that truth could be realized only through non-violence. Gandhi gave his own definition and explanation of non-violence which transcended conventional understanding of the concept. For Gandhi non-violence was not a negative concept meaning non-injury or non-killing but a positive one which meant love in the sense of selfless service of one's fellow beings which included the entire creation. The essence of his arguments is that one must try to practice non-violence in thought, word and deed and to organize all life activities on its basis, and that would bring in unprecedented and revolutionary changes in human life. The paper attempts to codify and put in perspective the defining features of non-violence as understood, explained and practiced by Mahatma Gandhi.

**Key Words:** Non-violence (Ahimsa), Truth (Satya), Gita, Revolutionary change

### INTRODUCTION

Gandhi was a multi-dimensional personality. He was at once a saint and a politician, an educationist and a journalist, a humanist and a social reformer. He was both a rebel and a prophet. Truth, non-violence, self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, peace, tolerance, universal love, equality and liberty were the constituent of his personality. He really lived and died for these ideals. By his high ideals and dynamic spiritual strength, he has in his lifetime become enshrined in millions of hearts. His countrymen idolized him as something more than human and the world at large revered him for his simplicity and the purity of his ideals. The new generation of young men and women who have not lived in his time would naturally like to have a close look at his personality which is like a legend to him.

## MEANING OF NON-VIOLENCE

The adoption and propagation of the cult of non-violence by Gandhi was undoubtedly a unique phenomenon in India. Non-violence for Gandhi was a principle second only to 'truth' in importance. In the development of Gandhi's non-violence many philosophies and individuals have contributed their share. He himself acknowledged that he followed an ancient Indian ideal which he also read in the teaching of all the greatest teachers of the world- Zoroaster, Mahavir, Daniel, Jesus, Mohammed, Nanak and a host of others. He borrowed from all sources in order to make the concept of non-violence more comprehensive, universal and humanistic.

Non- violence is the foundation of Gandhian thought. It occupies a central position in Gandhian thought and carries a global meaning. Mahatma was not the first to use the concept, but credit goes to him for giving it a new meaning by using it in a new context. He did not mean by violence what is ordinarily meant by it.

According to Gandhi, Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. He argued that it is not possible to seek and find truth without ahimsa (Dhiman 55).

Gandhi was a great supporter of truth and non-violence. **Truth (Satya), nonviolence, (ahimsa)** are foundation of Gandhi's philosophy. The word 'Non-Violence' is a translation of the Sanskrit term 'Ahimsa'. He stated that in its positive form. 'Ahimsa' means 'The largest love, the greatest Charity'. It means love towards all living creature. According to Gandhi ji, the negative aspect of Ahimsa consists in refraining from causing pain or killing any life out of anger or for selfish purpose, or with intention of injuring it. Thus, Ahimsa means avoiding injury to anything on earth in thought, word and deed. Ahimsa in its negative sense does not mean merely non-killing.

Ahimsa is usually mistaken for a purely negative doctrine. To Gandhi ahimsa is essentially a positive and dynamic force. Ahimsa is a positive doctrine, where love is central to whole concept. Its positive and greatest expression being, love and self – sacrifice, love even for one's enemies, as love of one's enemies demands the greatest self conquest. Hence, Gandhi could logically say, "In its positive form, ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of ahimsa, I must love my enemy... This active ahimsa necessarily includes truth and fearlessness" (Kappen 13).

However, non-violence does not mean that one should meekly submit to the will of the evil doer. In fact, it means that one should love even the evil-doer. It is a

confrontation between the will of the non-violent and that of tyrant. The non-violence is based upon the concept of spiritual unity with the opposite party which cannot be there if violence is met with violence. One should not use the language of the violent evil-doer. Under non-violence evil is sought to be won over by good; immorality is opposed by morality and physical force is challenged by soul-force and truth. It has great faith in the essential goodness of human nature. It is an effort to convert the bad to the good so that the evil-doer also becomes conscious of this spiritual unity with the non-violent individual (Gaur 33).

Gandhi says that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence. ‘I would advise violence...I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should, in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonor. But I believe that non- violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment.’ (Prabhu & Rao142)

According to Gandhi non-violence is the weapon of the strong. Non-violence cannot be taught to a person who fears to die and has no power of resistance. A helpless mouse is not non-violent because he is always eaten by pussy. He would gladly eat and murderess if he could but he ever tries to flee from her. We do not call him a coward because he is made by nature to behave no better than he does. But a man who, when faced by danger behave like a mouse, is rightly called a coward. He harbors violence and hatred in his heart and would kill his enemy if he could without being hurt himself. He is a stranger to non-violence (Bondurant 28).

Non-violence requires more training than violence. And the training process of non-violence is difficult than the training process of violence. The first and essential training of non-violence is to have living faith in God. That faith only will prevent the man to commit evil on anybody in word, thought and deed (Dass 53).

A living faith in non-violence is impossible without a living faith in God. A non-violent man can do nothing save by the power and grace of God. Without it he won't have the courage to die, without anger, without fear, and without retaliation. Such courage comes from the belief that God sits in the hearts of all and that there should be no fear in the presence of God. The knowledge of the omnipresence of God also means respect for the lives even of those who may be called opponents (Prabhu & Rao115).

Gandhi insists upon a close connection between the means and the ends. The goods means are the fundamental bases of goods ends. There is another reason for this. One has got a definite control over the means but it is not so with the ends. These are out

of one's control. The means gives a shape to the ends. We can control the means. Gandhi says, "As the means so the end." The means may be likened to seed, the end to a tree and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end, as there is between the seeds and the tree" (Gaur 39).

Although non-violence has been commended by several religious and social thinkers, Gandhi alone has clearly and continually distinguished between non-violence by the strong and the non-violence of the weak. The creed of violence, propounded chiefly by Nietzsche or Sorel, has been repudiated by most social and political thinkers, and yet many have sought to sanction the use of violence as a policy. Similarly, it is possible for people to advocate non-violence as a policy in particular circumstances, while remaining unwilling to accept it as an absolute creed. Reason could be employed to enjoin ahimsa in certain situations and contexts, but to believe in ahimsa as a creed demands an act of faith (Iyer 192).

When the idea of non-violence in Gandhian philosophy is analyzed then a number of characteristics features stand out. In his book '**Social and Political Thought**' of Gandhi J. Bandyopadhyay stated the following characteristics features of Gandhian non-violence.

- Non-Violence is not the same as non-killing.
- Non-Violence is not non-resistance born out of cowardice.
- Non-Violence implies several positive values. These values include love, active, resistance to injustice, courage in the face of violence, non-possession, truthfulness and brahmacharya.
- Non-Violence implies bread-labor, which Gandhi derived from **Ruskin** and **Tolstoy** and ultimately from the Bible. Gandhi defined it as the 'Divine Law that man must earn his bread by laboring with his own hands.'
- Non-Violence is a higher value than life. Gandhi regarded Non-Violence to be an ultimate value on three grounds. First, it is universally applicable. Secondly, it enhances all other values without detracting from any. Thirdly, it is unlimited in its application.

Gandhi believed that Non-violence in its absolute form is not realizable in practice. But relative non-Violence can be realized in practice. Gandhi stated that Just as the perfect straight line as understood by **Euclid** cannot be drawn. Similarly perfect Non-Violence cannot be attained. But limited Non-Violence can be attained. Gandhi stated that the Divine Spark is present within man and we must constantly endeavour to keep

alive that Divine Spark. Gandhi therefore regarded Non-Violence to be the law of our species. But at the same time Gandhi recognized the point that the practice of total Non-Violence in our life is not possible. Gandhi wrote, 'Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward violence.' This violence is directed against life.

Non-violence is a principle as well as a technique. The technique of non-violence is expressed by Gandhi by way of Satyagraha and non-cooperation. Satyagraha literally means adherence to truth. To offer Satyagraha is to be prepared to fight non-violently for the sake of truth. It may be fasting, or courting suffering and imprisonment. Satyagraha by way of fasting can be for self-purification and also to listen to the inner voice to know the truth. Satyagraha way of setting right the wrong-doer consists in not punishing the wrong-doer, but bearing the self-inflicted punishment in order to bring about a realization of the wrong in the offender. The aim of Satyagraha is to win over the evil-doer transforming him to be a good citizen. For example, in South Africa, when there was a moral lapse in his Ashram Gandhi undertook a fast to set right the wrong (Mathur 69)

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The real aim of ahimsa is to make the attitude of one's opponent soft rather than stiff. It is a humanistic approach which should change the psychology of the other party for the better. Gandhi would never harbor ill-will towards any person himself. For this very reason he did not hate the Englishmen but hated their system of administration which was exploitative. to him non-cooperation with evil was a duty in the same manner as cooperative was necessary with what was good. It was the refusal to cooperative with the English administrator on their own terms. He believed that the highest form of non-violence was a sufficiently good answer to the highest variety of violence (Gaur 35).

Moreover, Gandhi maintained that non- violence was not merely meant for the rishis and saints. It was meant for the common people. For him violence was not the natural law of society. Violence was the law of brute, the indication of a primitive nature. According to Gandhi, non-violence is natural while violence is unnatural. To follow the path of violence is like committing suicide. Non- violence is not taken note of normally because it is natural. Violence is noted because it is unnatural. Thousands of

disputes in society are being settled due to the force of love. When close relatives fall apart and quarrel and cease to love one another, it is specially noted (Unnithan 45).

Thus, Gandhi recommended punishment to wrong-doers in the present state of society. He prescribed that thieves and robbers should be confined. He however, advocated the use of prisons more as reformatories than as places of punishment. As a spiritual doctor, Gandhi wanted to apply the psychological and moral approach to crimes by treating them as a species of disease, but he did never say that the police should cease taking cognizance of public crimes. Gandhi thus makes these concessions to the absolutism of non-violence. The absolute application of non-violence would not favor the punishment even of thieves, robbers and murderers. But Gandhi was realistic enough to make certain concessions to the structure of our imperfect world for the present (Varma 164).

To remove the economic inequalities and exploitation Gandhi suggests the principle of trusteeship. The principle of trusteeship means that whatever talents, physical strength, wealth or other capacities a person might possess, he should take them as having been given to him as a trustee, for the benefit of the world (Goyal 84). Trusteeship is the non-violent method of bringing about economic equality in society and of rejecting conflicts between the labor and the capital.

According to Gandhi, the institution of trusteeship provides an opportunity to Capitalists and landlords in whose hands a huge quantum of wealth of the society is accumulated to voluntarily transfer their wealth to the society. Trusteeship is indeed, a non-violent alternative to class warfare and mass violence since its emphasis the ethico-religious dimensions in human beings (Patil & Lokapur 101).

Gandhi wanted India to follow the doctrine of non-violence not because she was prostrate due to political subjection. He affirmed that India had an imperishable "soul" which could rise above all weaknesses. But after independence, nevertheless, Gandhi, alike pessimistically and with some amount of mortification, said that India had adopted only the non-violence of the weak, because once the British power was out of the picture, the people engaged in unrestrained and intensely violent slaughter and internecine struggle. He confessed, "I have to hang down my head in shame" (Varma 161). He added, "I have already said that the non-violence that was offered during the past thirty years was that of the weak .... India has no experience of the non-violence of strong." (Varma 161). He stuck, however, to his faith in the moralization and spiritualization of politics and remained thoroughly devoted to the principle that increasing adherence to ahimsa alone would emancipate mankind from all kinds of conflict and evil.

Gandhi preached the Gospel of Ahimsa, both for the east and the west. But in their different situational context Ahimsa implied somewhat different thing for them. For India, Ahimsa as a social and political technique meant a pulling together the energies of the people for the work of national liberation. It implied the elimination of petty local jealousies and group, caste and communal discrimination and prosecutions and notions of regional superiority. It also signified the notion of realization of a national community based on suffering, tolerance self-abnegation and the neutralization of fissiparous trends (Varma 162).

For the western world, the Gandhian philosophy of Ahimsa mainly appeared as a Gospel of renunciation of Machtpolitik. In 1947, Gandhi wrote that if Europe was to save itself from suicide something along the lines of non-violence had to adopt. Non-violence applied to international politics signified a spiritual substitute for struggle and war and the consequent repudiation of “blood and iron” and “the mailed fist”. It thus, meant the negation of cults of powers, stratagems, exploitation enslavement, economic imperialism and war. But it was to be only a moral substitute for war and not the tame acceptance of status-quo. In face of the advancement in nuclear energy, Gandhi stood for the resort to technique of love because he was deeply concerned with the survival of man.

According to Gandhi self-realization is the final goal of man. It means seeing God face to face and this can be done by following the path of non-violence and truth. In view of Gandhi truth and non-violence are no new concepts. Both these are ancient concepts, ancient virtues, preached and practiced since time immemorial. He said, “I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as I could. Life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and non-violence” (Gandhi 105).

## **RELEVANCE**

Gandhi dominant the Indian politics from 1920 till his death in 1948 and is widely acknowledged as a great political leader and thinker. But he did not enter political life to gain political power. He remained in politics but completely freed himself from power politics, which has become an essential feature of political activities now-a-days. He entered politics because he realized that it was an effective means for rendering service to the people.

The Mahatma was a man marching towards a great destiny not only for India but for mankind through his life and work, his philosophy and programmes. Gandhi was

neither a theorist nor a philosopher. He was a man of action and activist. He was not given to abstract theories. He was contemplative man of actions, not an academic theorist. One has to piece together many of his writing and action to understand him and his concepts. It involves penetrating beyond the concrete Gandhian programmed and uncovering the foundation on they were based.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the most violent period of the human history. More people have suffered and have been killed by organized violence than any other time before. The wars, the genocides, the weapon of mass destructions have created such an enormous mass misery and agony that it is difficult to find any trace of hope. Therefore, Gandhi's teachings of non-violence are most relevant today. Now, though late, there is a realization that there is no other alternative.

Gandhi taught the lesson to the present world that our progress towards the goal would be in exact proportion to the purity of our means. This implied the rejection of war, espionage, and crooked diplomacy even if they are adopted for the so-called noble ends of defending one's country, religion or humanity. Non-violence is the very central tenet of Gandhi's philosophy and way of life. Gandhi conceded individual's right to truth as he perceived. But the truth was to be realized through non-violence. He said that the experience showed that success of violence had been short lived. The social change, brought about by non-violence, would be lasting and durable. His message that ends do not justify means cannot be ignored.

It is true that Gandhiji lived in an age which is regarded as the age of science and technology; it is the age of nuclear weapons. But Gandhiji did not think that human salvation was possible in and through the use of nuclear weapons. Scientific developments, according to him, brought happiness only so far as material prosperity was concerned. His concern was not material prosperity but spiritual prosperity which alone could bring salvation to mankind. Though he was not averse to scientific developments, he was very conscious of their proper use. Because, if they are improperly used they may lead to the destruction and annihilation of entire human race. Therefore, he stressed and very sincerely advocated the philosophy of Satyagraha which, according to him was a panacea for all human miseries. Satyagraha is thus a mighty force which cannot be deferred in any circumstances and it can only bring cohesion and unity in human life. Spiritual unity cannot be attained through subversive method. In order to achieve spirituality Gandhiji adopted and practiced the pure means of non-violence. No society can march along the path of progress and prosperity so long as it uses the method of violence. If we want all round progress, a Satyagrahi should unhesitatingly practice the discipline of non-violence.



Gandhi's non-violence is also applicable in social and political fields. According to Gandhi, in the social and political spheres, non-violence involves the search for ways to bring about the "good of all" (Sarvodaya) by means of corporate activity. He believes that since the principle of "the greatest good for the greatest number" stops short of 'all' it necessarily entails violence to some. On this conception a rigid application of the majority principle reduces to the principle of "might is right" which for Gandhi exemplifies the operation of brute force and violence in human affairs.

One of Gandhi's greatest contributions is the development of an active, dynamic way of combating social evil without the use of violence. Gandhi sought to combine the influence of moral power, love, integrity and goodness with non-violent strategy and techniques which resulted in providing an active dynamic method of struggle. In most of the Indian campaigns this method was followed out of expediency, though even then, there was associated with the movements the feeling that this was a morally superior method of struggle. The practice was not perfect. It was, however a distinct improvement over both violent struggle and reliance simply on individual moral influence. It is the most significant development in the philosophy and technique of revolution in our time.

In its positive sense Gandhi said that Ahimsa represents one of the basic and essential qualities of mankind. That does not mean that violence does not have any place in life. In fact, even in preserving one's existence one has to commit himsa of one kind or the other, and yet Ahimsa is considered to be the law of our species. In fact, Ahimsa is nothing but Love. Love is a kind of feeling of oneness. In an act of love, one identifies himself with the object of his love, and this cannot be possible unless there is an effort to free mind from every such disposition that prevents the spontaneous outflow of love. Therefore, Ahimsa demands a sincere effort to free mind from feelings like anger, malice, hatred, revenge, jealousy etc., because these create obstacle in the way of Love. According to Gandhi, love is the energy that cleanses one's inner life and uplifts him, and as such, love comprehends such noble feelings as benevolence, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity, kindness, sympathy etc.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can say that both Truth and Non-Violence are closely interrelated. They are the same sides of a same coin. A critical account of the Gandhian concept of Non-Violence shows that Gandhi was not aware of the deep-rooted aggressive instinct in man. Contemporary psychologist has pointed out that this instinct plays a major role in the human mental life. Gandhi did not play sufficient attention to it. His

account of Non-Violence seems to be more dependent on his readings of religious texts than on psycho-social considerations. This is a major critical point that may be raised against the Gandhian conception of non-Violence. If Non-Violence is the expression of the life-instinct within man then violence is the expression of the death-instinct. Gandhi's non-violent society would be a perfect democracy where each unit of a village was to be self sufficient, independent and free. If there is the necessity of the state at all, it should be non-violent in its nature. Great emphasis in this society was laid on rural life and decentralization. To Gandhi true freedom could be had only in a non-violent society.

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